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Congress has too many listening posts on the CIA

CIA Director William Casey attacks the "repeated compromise of sensitive intelligence sources and methods" in the leaks to the press about CIA plans and methods. He blames this in part on Congress' two intelligence oversight committees — and not without reason.

If intelligence oversight is to remain part of Congress' work — as political realities suggest it will — then the committees must obey the rules.

Senators and congressmen cannot argue against some proposed covert action, lose the battle internally — and then continue to oppose it by leaks which damage U.S. interests worldwide.

That's plainly what happened when the CIA's plan to overthrow Libya's dictator Moammar Khadafy wound up on the front page of the *Washington Post*.

But it is difficult to plug the leaks because so many people are privy to sensitive information. The members and staffs of the two committees total 96.

Another problem: congressional staffers are usually able, ambitious and hard-working, yet sometimes zealous, inexperienced and passionately ideological, wanting to change the world even if it means breaking congressional rules.

And the more people enjoy access to secrets, the easier it is for a politically motivated leaker to escape detection.

This problem is addressed by Rep. Henry Hyde's (R-Ill.) resolution calling for a single joint committee on intelligence to replace the two existing committees. As intelligence expert Cord Meyer pointed out last week in The Post, a joint committee would accomplish two major objectives.

It would sharply reduce the number of people with access to really sensitive secrets. And the restructuring involved could replace the present bloated and politicized staffs with a much smaller group of trustworthy professionals.

The resolution is rightly garnering support — and the chairmen of the two existing committees should not be allowed to obstruct its progress. The present situation is damaging to U.S. security.